1-1-1894

The Poet, Spenser

Frances M. Perry
Butler University

The Poet, Spenser.

Spenser's position among poets is isolated. He seems rather to maintain his place in the category of great writers by precedent, because the critics, conscious of their ignorance regarding him, dare not exclude him, than to be held there by living admiration. He is popular with no large class of readers and is rarely read extensively, though every course in English literature prescribes a moderate dose of Spenser, which is given by the teacher and taken by the pupil with little real intelligence or sympathy. The average literary student has a vague idea that Spenser is a great writer from the historic stand-point and leaves his works to the philologist or historian. The first soon finds that the writings of Spenser have little value from a linguistic point of view. His speech is not genuine, it represents no actual vernacular, it is artificially antiquated in imitation of the diction of works which we possess in the original. So far as the peculiarities of Spenser's English are concerned, considered apart from the quaint, artistic effect they were designed to produce, and looked at simply philologically, they are but

the pathetic reminders of the thwarted attempt of a sincere conservative, whose mind's eye was bent on the literary achievements of the past as unsurpassable models, not only to check the progress of the ship of thought, literature, but to tack in the face of the onward rushing current of action. The result of his effort was that he stranded himself in mid stream, where he fell behind others but could not go back to port.

The historian finds the ideal so intertwined with the real, finds facts concerning persons, customs, events etc. so garnished or denuded to suit the purpose or conform to the prejudices of the author, that he despairs of finding in Spenser's poems reliable valuable information; he could scarcely credit any historical fact contributed by Spenser unsupported by other authorities. This is not to say that he does not give vigorous historical suggestions and occasional "snapshots" of persons and events. No one could read his works without feeling that the writer lived at a time when the sea had a prominent place in the national life of England, when it had ceased to be the boundless, mysterious "salte see" of Chaucer's day and had become a territory over which man had begun to assert himself as mas-

ter; America with its tobacco and Indians is referred to in a manner which shows it to be a novel and possessing interest; Raleigh figures as the "Shepherd of Ocean"; The hatred of Elizabethan courtiers for the Spanish Philip is graphically set forth; the geographical notions of the times relating to erosion, upheaval etc. are suggested. But no one would accept as an historical authority a man who allowed his fancy such free play that it did not hesitate to tamper with the sacred myths of Greece and Rome.

The moralist, however eagerly he has sought Spenser's pages, wooed by the reputed allegory, finds the poetry long and the sermon short and gives up in despair.

Scholars reject Spenser's poetry as idle, pleasure seekers reject it as heavy. They think there is a shell to be cracked and never dream that, if they will but take it entire, that forbidding shell will dissolve and become honey sweet.

The Faery Queen.

There is something singularly rejuvenating about a day-dream in the midst of this work-a-day world, and the smiling eyes of the happy dreamer give evidence long after he has returned to his accustomed mundane activity that the sweetness

and light of that dream still linger in his heart. There is something similarly rejuvenating about the Faery Queen in the midst of the work-a-day literature of the nineteenth century. He who allows himself a week's revel in its pages will come from it with enough of its beauty to make sunshine in the shady places of modern literature for some time, if only he can let commentaries and glossaries alone and lose consciousness of knowledge, forget to criticise and enjoy rather than study the poem. For Spenser was not a philosopher, moralist, pedagogue or anatomist but a beauty loving poet and his successful reader must put aside his practical, analytical tendency and become a poet too. As the appearances that claim the observer's notice in a pageant might with interest and profit be investigated but should be simply believed in to be enjoyed, so the creations of Spenser, although rewarding analysis, must simply be accepted to be thoroughly enjoyed.

In his letter to Sir Walter Raleigh in explanation of the Faery Queen, Spenser gives the purpose of the poem as moral: "The general end, therefore, of all the book, is to fashion a gentleman or noble person in virtuous and gentle discipline---perfect

ed in the twelve private moral virtues". His adherence to this purpose he has stated graphically and truly in the first stanza of the twelfth canto of the sixth book:

"Like as a ship, that through the ocean wide
Directs her course unto one certain coast,
Is met of many a counter wind and tide,
With which her wingéd speed is let and crost'd
And she herself in stormy surgee toss'd:
Yet, making many a board and many a bay,
Still winneth way, ne hath her compass lost:
Right so it fares with me in this long way,
Whose course is often stay'd, yet never is astray".

The ethical progress of the work is often stayed by counter aesthetic winds and tides, for though in the long run "simple truth subdues avenging wrong", it must frequently wait till "beauty masters the most strong".

A goodly array of gentle knights and lovely ladies, each portraying some virtue and in physical perfection vying with the heroes and gods of Greece, take the leading parts in the development of the poem. To depict their ravishing loveliness was not an exhausting work for their creator, many beings of secondary interest from land and sea and heaven delight the fancy,

and still he has enough beauty left to give some of the vices a very pleasing semblance. Foul Duessa, falsehood, has her unsightliness hidden under so fair a front that even Una's knight "her takes to be the fairest wight that lived yit". and the false Florimell:

--Florimell herself in all men's view
She seemed to pass.

While Spenser often gilds the ugly, he so gladly glorifies the good that leaden treasure caskets are rare in his poems. One exception, however, in the Faery Queen, where the good has a rude exterior is worthy of note. It is the savage man who rescues Calepine and Serena. His tenderness and fidelity to that unfortunate pair and, later, the affection and obedience he renders to Prince Arthur are so touchingly and tenderly pictured that it is to be regretted that his character is unique.

Spenser veneers sin but never dignifies it as Milton does, and when he undertakes to depict it in its nakedness, makes its concrete forms as ideally and superlatively loathsome as he makes the incarnate virtues attractive. That he does not hesitate to

degrade humanity by representing baseness in the human form is shown by his portrayal of Pride's counsellors, her six sister sins, Foul Gluttony disarray'd, Até, mother of dissention, and the hags that follow Furor and maleger. And yet more the instances where

"under mask of beauty and good grace
Vile treason and foul falsehood hidden were",

show his readiness to recognize even the fairest human form as the possible harbor of vice. It is therefore to add horror and picturesque effect to his "lumps of foul deformity", rather than to spare humanity, that Spenser has recourse to the managerie of Faery Land in portraying the enemies of Righteousness. Error, the source of Milton's representation of sin, appearing as it does in all its monstrous hideousness and loathsomeness so near the commencement of the poem, has deterred many over-sensitive readers from reading further. But it is not the precursor of more of its kind nor yet of more offensive nature—it is isolated in its nauseousness and stands at the beginning as if Spenser, that lover of beauty, wished to have it out of the way as quickly as possible. The monsters most closely resembling it in repulsiveness are St. George's

dragon, "His body monstrous, horrible, and vast." Book I., Canto XI.; Duessa's "purple beast", Book I., Canto VII.-VIII.; Prince Arthur's Gorgon "horrible, hideous, and of hellish race", Book V, Canto XI., and the thousand tongued Blatant Beast. In the contests with these monsters no sense escapes unoffended, not only has each deadly power to harm with tooth and nail but its very ugliness blinds and its hideous cries deafen while the foul stench suffocates. The critic who said that no poet made so terrible a scourge of noisome odors as Dante must have been unfamiliar with Spenser.

Various animals of the natural world have also contributed largely to the picturesque ensemble of the poem. The brute creation strong, free, majestic, has an important place in art, and Spenser has made much of it. The spirited war-horse repeatedly arouses admiration. The gloom and majesty of the representation of night depends almost entirely on the chariot horses,

..."coal-black steeds yborn of hellish brood
That on their rusty bits did champ, as they were wood

. . . . . .

Her twyfold team - - - - - - - - - -

Did softly swim away, ne ever stamp
Unless she chanced their stubborn mouths to twitch;
Then foaming tar, their bridles they would champ.
And trampling the fine element would fiercely ramp."

The panic-stricken horses of the soldan are terror itself. "A tiger swift and fierce—That as the wind ran underneath his load" makes an appropriately uncanny steed for the ghostly maleger. How tender and delicate a peace-maker is the faithful dove who by her cunning the "dearest Dread" Belphebe, "unto that place did guide whereas That woeful man in langour did abide" and so brought about the reconciliation between his friend Timias, Prince Arthur's gentle squire, and the wrathful Belphebe. But there is no where a more telling and artistic adaptation of brute life to the purpose of the poem than in that most popular portion of The Faery Queen, the first Book, in the third canto, where the king of beasts, the ramping lion becomes the protector of helpless beauty:

"One day, nigh weary of the irksome way,
From her unhasty beast she did alight;
And on the grass her dainty limbs did lay
In secret shadow, far from all men's sight;
From her fair head her fillet she undight,
And laid her stole aside; Her angel's face

As the great eye of heaven, shinèd bright,
And made a sunshine in the shady place;
Did never mortal eye behold such heavenly grace,
"It fortunèd out of the thickest wood
A ramping lion rushèd suddenly,
Hunting full greedy after savage blood.
Soon as the royal virgin he did spy,
With gaping mouth at her ran greedily,
To have at once devour'd her tender corse;
But to the prey when as he drew more nigh,
His bloody rage assuagèd with remorse,
And with the sight amazed, forgat his furious force.
"In stead there of he kiss'd her weary feet,
And lick'd her lily hands with fawning tongue;
As he her wrongèd innocence did weet.
O how can beauty master the most strong,
And simple truth subdue avenging wrong!
Whose yielded pride and proud submission,
Still dreading death, when she had markèd long,
Her heart gan melt in great compassion;
And drizzling tears did shed for pure affection.
'The lion, lord of every beast in field,'
Quoth she, 'his princely puissance doth abate,
And mighty proud to humble weak does yield.
Forgetful of the hungry rage, which late
Him prick'd in pity of my sad estate:-

The lion would not leave her desolate,
But with her went along, as a strong guard
Of her chaste person, and a faithful mate
Of her sad troubles and misfortunes hard:
Still, when she slept, he kept both watch and ward;
And, when she waked, he waited diligent,
With humble service to her will prepared;
From her fair eyes he took commandement,
And ever by her looks conceived her intent."

In addition to the prominent places beasts are given in various scenes in the poem. Animal life is the pigment with which Spenser colors when he wishes to paint the deeds of men most vividly, it is now the light, now the shade for men's actions. Such figures as the following are numerous: like as a gosh-hawk, like a discoloured snake, as two fierce bulls, like a fell mastiff, as fearful fowl, as when two rams, as peacock, as when a tiger and a lioness, like two mad dogs, as when the fiery-mouthed steeds, like a lion wood, as when a greedy wolf, like an enraged cow, as when a vulture, as a dismayed deer, as when a swarm of gnats, like scattered sheep, like a fearful dove, like a swift otter, etc. To appreciate how rich an ornament such a simile may be, consider the figurative descrip-

tion of marinell's overthrow on his treasure-
stream shower by Britomart, so stately that
it almost obliterater the inglorious:

"Till, sadly sousing on the sandy shore,
He tumbled on an heap, and wallow'd in his gore.—
"Like as the sacred ox that careless stands
With gilden horns and flowry garlands crowned,
Proud of his dying honour and dear bands,
Whiles th' altars fume with frankin cense around,
All suddenly with mortal stroke astound
Both grovelling fall, and with his streaming gore
Distains the pillars and the holy ground.
And the fair flowrs that decked him afore,
So fell proud marinell upon the precious shore."

By free use of figures and by a discriminating employment of an ample vocabulary Spenser has been able to give character and individuality to each of the similarly glorious and excellent knights that he introduces. That Royal Childe, Poince Arthur, represents magnificence, which Spenser, following Aristotle, considers the perfection of all virtues." But of the twelve other virtues I make twelve other knights the patrons for the more variety of the history." As many of the promised twelve as were realized: The Red Cross

Knight, Holiness; Sir Guyon, Temperance; Britomart, Chastity; Triamon and Combel., Friendship; Artegall, Justice, and Calidore, courtesy, have books especially devoted to their adventures and take little or no part in the other books, Prince Arthur is the only knight who appears impartially in all. Each is in some way peculiarly attractive and impressive: St. George, at once so confiding and intrepid; Sir Guyon, calm and strong; Britomart, who adds to the purity of a Una the spirited vigor and irresistibility of an Artegall; Artegall whose gallant nature is the only vanquisher of his puissant arm and who, conquered, conquers; and Calidore, the very pink of courtesy. But the master stroke of the poem, Prince Arthur, in literature, like his prototype in society, remains unappreciated while his inferiors in ovations. The incidents of his career are pleasing, interesting, even severally exciting but without dénouement; consequently the minor characters often excite greater interest than he. Though the entrance of this heroic figure is always welcomed his exit is unregretted, almost unnoticed, for his aid is so opportune, so powerful and withal so free and unostentatious, that like Providence he is desired in distress and forgotten in prosperity.

not only is there more éclat about his particular entrances than his corresponding exits, but also (gracefully enough, though unintentionally) his introduction into the poem is much more ceremonious and splendid than his final leave-taking.

Arthur makes his first appearance as Una's Champion Book I., Canto VII. Una and the Red Cross knight having been separated by the wiles of Archimago, each fell into a labyrinth of difficulties. The Red Cross knight was immediately ensnared in the toils of Duessa and under her guidance entered the House of Pride, whence he narrowly escaped with his life. Then drinking of the enervating waters of the enchanted stream, he lost his native vigor and fell easy prey to the giant Orgoglio, by whom he was imprisoned in the deepest dungeon of his castle. Una, meanwhile, heart-broken at what she deemed her knight's faithlessness, wandered hither and thither vainly seeking him. For a time she traveled protected by her royal body-guard the lion, but at length the iniquitous Sansloy slew the noble beast and had well-nigh overpowered defenseless Una, when the Satyrs came to her rescue and bore her

away to their forest home. She strove during her stay with them to show those creatures who would worship her the true worship and, besides, to teach them many useful arts. Thus employed she lived among them an idolized captive until with the help of Satyrane she made her secret escape. meting her old page the dwarf, she learned from him of her knight's imprisonment, but undaunted by all difficulties she undertook the apparently impossible task of his deliverance. Her efforts were not unrewarded:

"At last she chanced by good hap to meet
A goodly knight, fair marching by the way,
Together with his squire, arrayed meet:
His glitt'ring armour shined far away,
Like glancing light of Phoebus' brightest ray:
From top to toe no place appeared bare,
That deadly dint of steel endanger may,
Athwart his breast a baldric brave he ware,
That shined, like twinkling stars, with stones
most precious rare:- - - - - - - - -
His warlike shield all closely covered was,
Ne might of mortal eye be ever seen;
Not made of steel, nor of enduring brass,
(Such earthly metals soon consumed been,)
But all of diamond perfect pure and clean

It framed was, one massy entire mould,
Hewn out of adamant rock with engines keen,
That point of spear it never percen could,
Ne dint of direful sword divide the substance would

. . . . . .

No magic arts hereof had any might,
Nor bloody words of bold enchanter's call:
But all that was not such as seemed in sight
Before that shield did fade and sudden fall:
And, when him list the rascal routs appal,
Men into stones therewith he could transmew,
And stones to dust, and dust to nought at all.

As well equipped in the qualities as in the arms of knighthood, the prince, distressed by Una's woe, persuaded her to tell him her sad story. His gracious sympathy and encouragement repaid her confidence, with better heart she accompanied her newly acquired friend, and under the leadership of the dwarf they proceeded together to the castle of Orgoglio. When they reached the castle, Una, as was commonly the custom with women, stopped at a little distance from what was to be the scene of conflict to observe in safety the encounter. The knight and squire rode to the gates and demanded entrance, but receiving no response, had recourse to the magic

bugle, whose "shrilling sound" unbarred gates and doors and brought the mighty giant on the scene. followed by Duessa on her many-headed beast, all confounded at the "piercing noise": most terrible was the ensuing conflict between the fierce and potent giant seconded by the hideous Hydra, and Prince Arthur supported by his valiant squire. In the end the prince was victorious, the giant and the beast were slain, Duessa captured and what was left of the Red Cross knight delivered from his foul cell. The victors stayed at the conquered castle a few days, until the knight of the Red Cross had partially regained his health and strength, then resumed their journey together. Una in her happiness was not forgetful of the agent of that happiness but in her gratitude to her benefactor insisted that he rehearse to her his history. Yielding to her urgency Prince Arthur told how he had been reared by Faerys, old Timon and the great magician Merlin, and knew nothing of his ancestry save that he was a king's son. He had entered upon knighthood with a consuming desire for glory and with disdain for so effeminate a sentiment as love, but one day while sleeping he saw in a dream the Faery

Queen and awoke so in love with her that his chief end in life henceforth was to find to win, to be worthy of her. When divergence of ways made the separation of the knights necessary, they exchanged presents and took most kindly leave of one another. As is usually the case Arthur goes his way alone while the reader follows the Red Cross knight to be a fellow-spectator with Una when he slays the dragon.

By reason of Una's courteous urgency it is made apparent that Prince Arthur is no reckless, aimless wanderer, not simply a knight <u>errant</u>, but a man with a purpose, which is none the less consuming because he never intrudes it upon others. "All's fair in love and war" might seem the motto of many errant knights, but it was not so with Arthur;-the duty of deserving his lady was always more to him than the pleasure of winning her, to be a man was more essential than to be a successful lover or warior. The knowledge the reader has of his ungratified love and bootless quest makes his self abnegation when his services are in demand, his utter and uncom-

plaining yielding of self and time to the release of those in trouble, more evident and admirable.

In the foregoing adventure Prince Arthur's inspiration to gallantry was a beautiful disconsolate maiden. In the ensuing one it was a grave palmer who besought him to protect a helpless knight, Sir Guyon, who having come from a prolonged visit to Mammon's delve where he had tasted neither food nor drink, fell into a deadly swoon and lay thus the defenseless victim of wrathful Cymochles and Pyrochles until Prince Arthur interfered in his behalf. The Prince was in no haste to prove the strength of the unknightly fellows and in his reluctance to quarrel on all occasions differs from his brother knights, who are always eager on the slightest provocation to cross swords. Conscious of his invulnerability he ever bore in mind his own saying, "Honour is least, where odds appeareth most". After inquiring from both palmer and knights the causes of attack, he endeavored with the greatest tact and persuasion to appease their anger, but receiving for his pains only

outrage, he resorted to his weapon, repaid the undefied blow he had received with interest and overpowered with his might both of the pugnacious brothers, notwithstanding the fact that his hand was repeatedly stayed from bloody execution by the image of his long-sought lady. The Faery Queen, graven on Sir Guyon's shield with which one of the craven knights defended himself:

"His hand relented and the stroke forbore,
And his dear heart the picture gan adore".

When Guyon recovered his senses after the fray, he was overwhelmed with gratitude towards his preserver and was only checked in his expressions of indebtedness by the rebuke of Arthur, who reminded him that he had but done his duty as a knight. As they rode along, Prince Arthur could not restrain the curiosity that the image of the Faery Queen on his companion's shield aroused and with some hesitation questioned Sir Guyon concerning her. He was assured in response to his inquiries that she would accept his services most graciously, then as if ashamed of so

long attending to his own interests, he hastened to say:

"- - - - - - - - - - but mote I weet
What strange adventure do you now pursue?
Perhaps my succour or advisement meet
Mote stead you much your purpose to subdue".

Having reached the house of Temperance "In which doth sober Alma dwell" the two knights decided to seek shelter there for the night. They overpowered the enemies that sprang up at their approach to deter them from their purpose and, entering the house, were most courteously received by its mistress. By way of entertainment Alma conducted her guests through her dwelling, not omitting the kitchen, in which the knights were especially interested, gazing with delight and wonder on the goodly order in general and the sewer in particular,

"For never had they seen so strange a sight".

They were further introduced into the chambers of the sages, Temperance' counsellors, Imagination, Judgement and memory:

"The first of them could things to come foresee;
The next could of things present best advise;
The third things past could keep in memory".

The last was most interesting to the visitors, they

gained permission to read his books and in them found much that was laudable about Spenser's "most dreade sovereign":

On the following day, —

"Early, before the morn with crimson ray
The windows of bright heaven open'd had,
Through which into the world the dawning day
might look, that maketh every creature glad,
Uprose Sir Guyon in bright armour clad,
And to his purposed journey him prepared."

No sooner was this knight well on his way than the enemies of Temperance assembled under their leader Maleger and besieged her castle most furiously. Then did the royal Arthur arm himself and go forth against his hostess' foes to be a leading actor in one of the most curious and fanciful encounters described in all literature - Book II., Canto XI. After a most desperate hand-to-hand struggle, Arthur mastered his uncanny opponent and, carrying him in his "puissant handes", cast him into the nearest pond. When the conquering hero returned from his successful sally against the foe, he was most warmly welcomed and tenderly cared for. When he had recovered from his wounds he

was again joined by Sir Guyon, who had come back from his perilous expedition to the Bower of Bliss, from which he returnrned with Acrasia, pleasure, Captive, and the two knights pursued together their search for becomming adventures. Their first recorded adventure was with Boitomart in knight's attire. Guyon's request to "run that turn" having been willingly granted. This one of the many "gentlest knights that ever armour bore" sustained a most sudden and surprising overthrow—

"— Guyon's self, ere well he was aware,
High a spear's length behind his crupper fell;"

His rage and shame at this dishonor were finally mollified by the kindly tact of Prince Arthur, who—

"laid the blame, not to his carraige
But to his starting steed that swerved aside,
And to the ill purveyance of his page,
That had his furniture not firmly tied."

The poet suggest that even Arthur's tact might not have allayed his mortification had he known that he had been unhorsed by a maid.) Having been reconciled, the three knights proceeded in company until Florimell, chased by a "grisly fo'ster", flashed across their path. Arthur and

Guyon immediately rushed to the assistance of the terrified Florimell but, as Spenser wittily says

"---fair Britomart, whose constant mind
Would not so lightly follow beauty's chase,
Ne reck'd of ladies' love, did stay behind".

In their anxiety to succor the maiden the two knights only increased her terror and hastened her flight. In the wild chase that ensued all were separated: Florimell made her escape, The forester fled pursued by Timias, who was thus parted from his master, who galloped one way in quest of vanished Florimell while Sir Guyon with equal zeal tried another. In this case Prince Arthur was not entirely disinterested, pity was not his only spur; the beauty of Florimell possessed him, he was impatient to overtake and befriend her, it even occurred to him that she might be his Faery Queen, and he wished that if she were not, his queen might be like her. At length, having despaired of finding her, he bethought himself of faithful Timias and reproaching himself for having so long endured a separation which might be caused by some dire misfortune to his Squire, he retraced his steps and sought

diligently for him, but his search was long and punctuated with adventures.

On one occasion, as he rode through the woods, he found Amoret and Amylie, whom Belphebe had saved from the hideous monster who had captured them, suffering from recent wounds and lack of food. Arthur had not been permitted to serve Florimell, whom he so yearned to serve, but these two women in whom he had no personal interest occasioned him a great expenditure of time and pains, which he gave with unexceptionable gallantry, most chivalrously plodding along in his heavy armor through the stifling heat, leading his nervous charger burdened with the two fearful damsels. They were making painful progress in this wise, when a dwarf pursued by a mighty man mounted on a dromedary claimed their attention. That royal peace-maker, Arthur, found here an opportunity to exercise his philanthropic proclivities, here were oppressors to overthrow, prisoners to liberate and lovers to re-unite. Arthur found his generous action in this matter not altogether unrewarded. For his interference had restored Amylie to her lover and so re-

lieved him of half his charge. When harmony had been established and Arthur's presence was no longer necessary, he and Amoret went forth together in search of their loves, each lost in his own thoughts and neither making a confidant of the other. Their attention was diverted by an unequal encounter in which four knights took sides against two. That spectacle was enough to arouse Arthur's mettle, and he rushed to the reinforcement of the weaker side. When peace was effected, the two knights whom he had seconded were found to be our old friend Britomart and Amoret's lover, Scudamore, both of whom had been seeking Amoret most persistently.

After a somewhat prolonged absence from the pages of the Faery Queen Arthur reappears, not with Britomart but in conflict with her lover, "stern Artegall". The two knight rushing simultaneously to the defense of a helpless girl closely followed by two villains, each killed one of the maiden's foes, then fell furiously upon each other, each mistaking the other for the maiden's second tormentor. Their combat was, however, ended

ere it was well begun by the girl's urgent demand for their attention while she explained their mistake, and

"When they saw their foes dead out of doubt,
Eftsoones they gan their wrothful hands to hold
And ventails rear eachother to behold,
Tho, whenas Artegall did Arthur view,
So fair a creature and so wondrous bold,
He much admirid both his heart and hue
And touched with entire affection nigh him drew."

Both members of the great fraternity of Faery knights, they were friends at once and joined forces to deliver the girl and her gracious mistress Mercilla from their powerful and ignominious enemy. By a clever trick Artegall entered the castle of the enemy and overpowered the inmates, while Arthur without, after a fearful encounter in which he with difficulty defended himself from the furious onsets of his antagonist, the Soldan, who was advantageously placed on his lofty war chariot, gained the mastery by use of his magic shield, which terrified the Soldan's steeds and sent them plunging off to their master's destruction. Having completely exterminated the enemy, both knights accompanied

the maid to the court of her mistress, mercilla (Elizabeth) where they witnessed the trial of Duessa, (Mary Queen of Scotts) and marveled at mercilla's charity and magnanimity towards that "guilty thrall". In Faery Land it doesn't always follow that things equal to the same thing are equal to each other; so, though mercilla is Elizabeth and Elizabeth the Faery Queen and the Faery Queen Prince Arthur's Lady, it must not be supposed that therefore mercilla is Prince Arthur's Lady any more than Belphebe, who is also Elizabeth, is the Faery Queen. While Arthur was mercilla's guest two of Belge's sons came to the court to beg her assistance in their mother's behalf, who had been defrauded of her kingdom and bereft of her children by the tyrant Geryoneo. When Arthur had heard the woeful story and saw none of mercilla's subjects ready to undertake the enterprise:

"He stepped forth with courage bold and great
Admired of all the rest in presence there
And humbly gan that mighty queen entreat
To grant him that adventure for his former feat."

mercilla gladly granted his request. He found

the deposed queen most dejected and forlorn but he gave her good cheer, which he was able to back with powerful deeds. Soon he had taken her castle from the enemy and overthrown the tyrant himself and slain the consuming monster (the Inquisition) that had caused her so much sorrow. and amid the joy of her subjects now released from terror and oppression, reinstated her as queen.

Having "settled Belgè in her rayne" he returned to his original quest with unabated zeal. As he traveled through the woods, he chanced upon a single knight nearly overpowered by the combined strength of three opponents. At Arthur's appearance the three fled, leaving their victim to the embrace of his master, for it was no other than Timias.

"my lief, my life's desire,
Why have ye me alone thus long yleft?
Tell me what world's despite, or heaven's ire
Hath you thus long away from me bereft."

It was with such affectionate outbursts that Prince Arthur rejoiced in the discovery of his somewhat delinquent squire, who had been idly sighing under Belphebe's frown or reveling in the sunshine of her smiles. But however

happy in their reunion, master and man could not continue long together. Timias had been wounded by the Blatant Beast and was consequently unfit for arduous labor. so after they had overtaken Serena and heard her story of the cowardly and unknightly knight who had occasioned all her woe, gentle Timias was given charge of the sorrowing maiden, who was suffering from an injury like his own inflicted by the Blatant Beast, and Prince Arthur, with Serena's Savage man to act as his squire, went forth against the tyrant Turpine. In this expedition arthur showed his usual power and magnanimity and having vanquished his cowardly foe, spared his life at his lady's request. His mercy was repaid with treachery——

"Riding a softly pace with portance sad,
Versing of his love more than of danger drad";

he was overtaken by two men hired to slay him under false pretenses by the craven Turpine. Having with ease mastered these two knights, less powerful and less skillful than himself, their employer straightway received from him his due punishment.

Timias, who had meanwhile been taken captive by Maribella's guards, Scorn and Disdain, was again released by his noble master, who, though less eager than he to undertake battle, had more strength to conduct it. Having conquered,

"Arthur with the rest went onward still
On his first quest, in which him did betide
A great adventure which did him from them divide"

And the story goes on leaving the reader all unconscious that he has seen the last of princely Prince Arthur. It is as if one were spared the pain of parting, and the effect is peculiarly pleasing. That heroic character, complete in his incompleteness, makes his departure, not when he has reached the goal for which he strives as do most literary heroes, but when he is on the highroad to success, leaving the assurance that he is worthy and therefore, where Spenser is the dispenser of justice, will win his lady. This relieves his case of the discomfort of uncertainty as to his destiny, while it admits freedom for personal invention as to the incidents which lead to its accomplishment. This makes Arthur a character of living interest who has a future as well as a past, who awakens expectations as well as memories.

The Faery Queen runs on for several cantos after Arthur's final disappearance from its pages, giving a picture of Spenser's conception of Shepherds' life in Faery Land. The sixth book closes with the subjection of that common enemy of many of the last-mentioned characters of the poem, the Blatant Beast, by Calidore, courtesy, but the warning is added that many years later the creature broke its chains and is again at large:

"He spareth he the gentle poet's rhyme".

Arthur is commonly regarded as simply the connecting link of the poem, Spenser has been so far from forcing his moral with regard to him upon the reader that few are conscious of it. Even after reading the Author's declared purpose concerning this character, few will admit that he has represented what he projected, but insist that, carried away by incident, he has lost sight of his purpose and allowed it to become not secondary to but absolutely overridden by side-issues. And because he has not made all other characters merely lights and shades for the display of this one, they condemn poor Arthur as a sort of ever-ready pan-

acca, an old reliable, a Jack of all Trades, to be called upon when all other resources fail, forgetting that in this characteristic of rendering real service to those who need it most, when they need it most, lies his supremacy rather than in the brilliancy of his achievements, in this regard Spenser has made Arthur a veritable savior. It is not Spenser's fault but the reader's that Arthur's character excites so little admiration. He is too normal, too typical, too universal, too impartial, and impersonal, too much "Hero as divinity" to suit mankind. As Eliot has made Daniel Deronda say: "we faulty creatures never feel so much for the irreproachable as for those who are bruised in the struggle with their own faults - - - not that the finer nature is not more adorable" - - , we creatures of excesses are impatient of perfect temperance we are unresponsive to it. We can sympathize with Calidore, who forgets the Blatant Beast while he woos Pastorell; Spirited Britomart, with a savor of vanity and jealousy, is a kindred spirit; So is St. George in his susceptibility to deception and remorse; Sir Guyon never appeals to the ordinary reader in his resistance to the allurement of Mammon,

nor yet when he braves the horrors of a worse than Argonautic expedition, it is when he forgets himself and looks too long at the nymphe in the court of the Bower of Bliss that the reader feels the first throb of fellowship. But if one sets out to depict an ideally perfect character, one can not pander to the perverted taste of average humanity. Such a character is enduring and must finally prevail, for if we but yield ourselves to its influence we shall become enough like it to see it as it is and be satisfied.

Shorter Poems.

The Faery Queen was the poetical achievement of Spenser's life. His other poems are but literary incidents, while that is an event. Some of his minor poems are exceedingly sweet and musical, but most of them are wofully colorless and insipid in comparison with the Faery Queen. This is true of the Shepherd's Calendar, which is perhaps the most commonly read of all Spenser's poems. It was his first published work and though it has enough real merit to have won its author some notice, inde-

pendently of it flattering tributes to the literary patrons of his age, it lacks vigor and power and freedom. The reader, especially if he is familiar with the Faery Queen, is conscious here of a reserve, a restraint on the writer's part, which seems to be occasioned by no want of self confidence in the poet, but from a fear lest others think him presumptious if he soars to the heights his desire dictates. The effect of this curb is not altogether unhappy, for while it certainly weakens the poem as a whole, it lends it a sort of timidity, quite in keeping with pastoral poetry, which gives to certain portions their soothing, gentle placidity.

The Shepherd's life depicted in the Shepherd's Calendar is as fanciful and imaginary as the Knights' errant in the Faery Queen. There has been no more attempt to reproduce things as they are in the one case than in the other. The matter of the poem is set forth in dialogues between several shepherds, carried on in different months of the year, the conversation and state of mind of the speakers reflecting the changing seasons. Colin Clout, a transparent mask for Spenser himself, figures most prominently among the piping shep-

herds as:
"O Colin, Colin, the shepherd's joy:"
The purpose of his song is the rehearsal of his unrequited love for Rosalind. It is the light thrown by these lamentations on his early love affair that has in all probability given to this poem its especial popularity. The brightest, strongest stroke in it is the old Shepherd, Thenot's story of the Oak and the Brere. All in all, it is a graceful idyl but call to mind Calidor's sojourn among the shepherds, and it must be admitted that in comparison with the free, breezy pastoral life glimpsed forth in the Faery Queen, there is the suggestion, at least, of a whine about the Shepherd's Calendar.

Colin Clout 's Come Home Again, naturally associated with the Shepherds Calendar, was written in 1591, twelve years later, by a more accustomed hand and is not characterised by the caution so evident in its forerunner; less carefully labored. it has more swing and movement. This poem represents Colin in a very different state of mind. As the companion of "The Ocean's Shepherd" he has left his native hillside home

and visited Cynthia's court accross the sea. He has come back, still vowing eternal allegiance to his Rosalind, it is true, but no longer believing all beauty to have died with her and reconciled to her non-reciprocation of his affection. The poem is chiefly spent in eulogizing Elizabeth and her ladies.

The varied and elaborate sonnets or Amoretti, in which Spenser serves up, now in detail and again en masse, the charms of his "dear hearts desire", have their fitting climax in that jubilant outburst, Epithalamion. His supplication: "– let this day, let this one day, be mine", was granted for he possessed it so fully that he was able to give that memorable wedding day, the 11th of June, 1594, in all its triumphant joy to posterity. Prothalamion, written on the occasion of the double marriage of his friends the daughters of the Earl of Worcester to Henry Gilford and William Peter, is calm and sweet. Its refrain "Sweet Thames! run softly, till I end my song" is quite different from the reverberating:

"- - - - - - - - - - - - Sing
That all the woods may answer and your
Echo ring –" of Epithalamion.

Spenser's four Hymns on Love and Beauty (two on earthly love and beauty and two on Celestial), written in 1596, are important as what we may call the key notes of his religion since he was a worshiper of Love and Beauty. Here where we might have expected the very quintessence of poetical luxuriousness, Spenser, far from producing extravagant effusions in praise of "the very gods of his idolatry", becomes unpoetical in his argumentative clearness, just as he often does in his sonnets addressed to his most dearly beloved.

"Visions of the World's Vanity", written in 1591, is a sermon by similies on the powerlessness of power.

Muiopotmos or, The Fate of the Butterfly, published in 1590, recounts a butterfly's capture by a spider. It is trifling and uninteresting. Its redeeming trait is the account of the origin of the spider.

Mother Hubbard's Tale, possibly intended to be humorous but very flat, is a satire on the craftiness and folly of those who sometimes fill high places. It relates the experiences of a Fox and an Ape as under different

disguises they fill various important offices.

Astrophel is a melodious "Pastoral Elegy upon the Death of the most noble and valorous Knight, Sir Philip Sidney" - It contains a pretty conceit to the effect that after death he and his beloved were converted into a flower. This tribute to Sidney's memory is far surpassed by that noble poem The Ruins of Time. Rich, fluent, graphic, and characterized by a grand sort of pathos, it is one of the very finest of Spenser's lesser works. The certainty of Time's consignment of glorious deeds and earthly greatness to oblivion is deplored, and poetry is lauded as the only perpetuator of glory:

"For deeds do die, however nobly done,
And thoughts of men do as themselves decay;
But wise words taught in numbers for to run,
Recorded by the muses live for aye"

The poem closes with six beautiful sonnets symbolizing Sidney's life and character.

Usually classified with "The Ruins of Time" but widely different from it in merit, is The Tears of the muses. One can not help wondering how the Right Honorable, the Lady Strange, ever survived The Tears of the muses

and lived to be the victim of some of milton's superfluous poetry. Spenser's compliment to her Ladyship represents each of the nine muses successively bewailing the ignorance of man and his neglect of themselves. It is such a monotonous, doleful, drenching poem that it is remarkable that the poor woman to whom it was addressed did not perish in the flood.

The poem entitled Virgil's Gnat was dedicated to the Earl of Leicester but was not published till 1591. Its theme is ingratitude. With the exception of the gnat's actual plaint, which is somewhat tedious the poem is what it is promised to be by it author "an easy running verse with tender feet".

Daphnaida once read can never be forgotten. It is touching in the extreme, the crystallization of human anguish in the despair that follows loss by death, now tender in recollection of the sweetness of the past, anon hardened by consciousness of the emptiness of the present. One feels that under cover of Alcyon Spenser expresses a sorrow of his own.

In addition to the poems mentioned, several translations made by him of short Latin poems still survive though many of his earlier poems are lost.

Diction and Versification.

E.K. supposed by some to be Spenser himself, in his prefatory letter commending the Shepherd's Calendar declares Spenser's deviations from the English of the Elizabethan era (which less fastidious writers such as Bacon and Shakespear found quite satisfactory without renovation) to have been to some extent involuntary and inevitable, he says: "having the sound of those ancient poets still ringing in his ears, he must needs in singing hit out some of their tunes". Further Spenser chose for various reasons to be antiquated; first, because of the beauty and dignity that the antiquated forms would lend to his verse, or in the words of E.K. "they bring great grace and as one would say authority to the verse"; second, for the purpose of contrast, (this applying more to the dialectic than to the archaic terms) for, according to E.K. "those rough and harsh terms illumine and make more clearly to appear the brightness of brave and glorious words"; and again, he admired the Old English and desired to bring into use words and forms long disused — "he hath laboured to restore as to their rightful heritage such good and natural English words as have been long time out of use". To these alleged reasons may be added a plausible but less meritorious one, namely, that the

employment at pleasure of lost inflections made versification easier. And what may have been in the beginning a studied artifice must soon have become a convenient license, whose renunciation would have greatly hampered Spenser's fluency.

So far as the embellishment of his own verses is concerned, it must be conceded that Spenser was wise his taste was good. With the aid of old endings and certain musical words and expressions that belonged to our infant English and have been preserved by Chaucer he secured for his poetry more of Chaucer's "divine liquidness of diction and fluidity of movement" than have been attained by any other poet. But his judgement was in fault when he expected to restore to the Speech of the English people words and forms of words that time and usage had rejected. He believed his poetry to have power enough to lift up those fallen words, but instead they have proven their power to hold down his poetry very securely. He thought he was building a Cathedral for the habitation of his ideas and he well nigh built a tomb. Spenser's attempt to reestablish archaisms met with the disapproval of some of the most discerning of his contemporaries. Sidney and Jonson did not hesitate to express

their adverse criticism regarding his undertaking. He had at the same time a large class of followers, and it became the fashion to affect obsolete words and antiquated expressions in poetry, for a time; this fashion was revived in the eighteenth century, when it was very popular to write in the style of Spenser, "which", says Lounsbury, "in the eighteenth century meant to adopt the Spenserian stanza flavored with a little bad grammar and the occasional insertion of an obsolete word."

It has been found that Spenser uses about five hundred obsolete words, the majority of which can be traced to Chaucer, though he gives to some meanings other than Chaucer intended in his use of them.

The inflections Spenser uses were also taken from Chaucer. Those found most commonly are the following: the termination en in the plural of the present and the infinitive, as;

"Tho to the greenwood they speeden them all
To fetchen home may with their musical";

also in the plural of the preterit and in the past participle, for examples:

"The red rose medled with the white yfrere,
In either cheek depeincten lively cheer".

"When the rain is fallen and clouds waxen clear"

"Durst not adventure such unknowen waye"

(I think Chaucer gives no authority for the use of that ending in the pres. part. as used by Spenser: "The while they were liven at ease and leisure".); es in the plural and in the gen. sing., as:
"They slew them and upon their fleshes fed."
"Or other great one in the worldes eye".;
the very frequent use of the ed of the participle and preterit as an extra syllable; the verb endings - eth and st, also occasionally adopting some of the old forms of pronunciation, and making silent vowels contribute to his measures, as:
"And laid the blame not to his carriage"; and again;
"From her fair eyes he took commandement."
He frequently makes use of the old custom of changing the stem vowel, for the sake of rhyme.
Though Spenser was more successful than other imitators of Chaucer's diction have been, he is not infallible. He sometimes uses unauthorized inflections, invents words or takes them from unreliable sources or devises meanings of his own for authentic archaisms, while some of the mysteries of Chaucer he never unraveled, for instance, the pronunciation of the final e so common with Chaucer.
Spenser's favorite measure is Iambic

Pentameter. The noble Spenserian stanza, for which Spenser is famous, in which the Faery Queen is written, and in which so many noble contributions to literature have since been written, consists of nine verses; eight Heroic or Iambic Pentameter, the ninth Alexandrine. The body of the stanza is a quatrain interwoven with an introductory and closing couplet, the last line rhyming with the last couplet, or, lines one and three rhyme, lines two, four, five and seven, and lines six, eight, and nine.

The Sonnets called Amoretti consist of two central quatrains interwoven with each other and enclosed by two couplets, the first couplet being intertwined with the first quatrain and the second couplet intertwined with the the second quatrain; the whole is closed with a free couplet.

The sonnets closing "The Ruins of Time" have another arrangement. They have a central quatrain enclosed by interwoven triplets, the first of which is further interwoven with the initial couplet, while the closing couplet is free. Those entitled "Visions of the World's Vanity" are the simplest. Two intertwined quatrains again intertwined with terminal couplets, and the final free couplet.

The majority of Spenser's verses are remarkably smooth and harmonious, as some one has said, almost cloying in their sweetness. There are rugged verses in the Shepherd's Calendar and in Mother Hubbard's Tale but they are intentional imperfections, deemed by the author suitable to the subject matter.

The Chief Qualities of his Poetry.

The average reader will find Spenser not only obscure but abstruse. The obscurity is occasioned by the eccentricities of diction already mentioned and, in the Faery Queen, by confusion of events and inconsistencies of statement. He is abstruse because of his numerous archaisms and (again referring particularly to the Faery Queen) the intricacy of his plot, the allegorical significance of the poem, the vague references or rather allusions to his contemporaries and his multitudinous mythological and historical references. Neither the charge of obscurity nor of abstruseness is however derogatory to Spenser. As for abstruseness the fault there lies with the reader and not

with the writer. Obscurity, which is usually so great a blemish, may almost be said to enhance the charm of Spenser's poetry. It veils the splendor of Faery Land, it adds mystery to the mysterious, it puts the reader in dreamy sympathy with the poem. Whatever will help in the least to transport the reader from the prosaic, realistic world he is likely to be inhabiting to Spenser's Faery Land can not be frowned upon.

In the Faery Queen the ideal element of chivalry is preserved, all that was true and beautiful and good in it is there perpetuated, the false and evil only appear as the proof of the good. The Shepherd's Calendar pictures ideal Shepherd's life, Epithalamion, celebrates an ideal marriage, and so on; Mother Hubbard's Tale is in part an attempt at commonplace realities, still in a very figurative way, but it is a failure up to the point where the attempted satire is lost in the presentation of an ideal animal life. One would scarcely expect the poet to succeed with the commonplace who writes of the mole on Pastorella's breast:

"- - - - - - - a little purple mold
That like a rose her silken leaves did fair unfold".

Spenser's power for creating beautiful scenes and beautiful creatures seems inexhaustible, but yield yourself, and you are soon bewildered by the maze of beauty in which you find yourself entangled.

In general characteristics there could scarcely be two poets more unlike than Spenser and his much admired Chaucer. Chaucer is keen, analytic, vivacious. Spenser is vague, general, almost languid. Chaucer's characters are individuals, Spenser's are types, the one is the realist, the other the idealist; one the man of prompt action, the other the man of rapturous emotions.

At intervals throughout the Faery Queen Spenser seems to feel called upon to deplore in a most pessimistic fashion the degeneracy of the times. His precept is almost invariably pessimistic, but it is not sustained by the parable, either considering the poem as a whole or looking at parts. There is something very fine and highly optimistic in the conception of that ruthless Iron man,

Talus, or Power,

"---- swift as swallow in her flight
And strong as lion in his lordly might",

intrepid, relentless, uncompromising, knowing no master but one, Justice, to whom he yields unquestioned obedience and in whose service he makes such terrible onslaughts against sin, conquering in the end even Guile itself! This alone is a sufficiently powerful argument to cast a suspicion of insincerity on Spenser's pessimism. In the "To be or not to be" of The Faery Queen, Despair overcomes the Red Cross knight, (Holiness) by logic, but Una (Truth) saves him.

The ultimate effect of Spenser's poetry is in fact bright and wholesome. But while Spenser is so replete with the beautiful and cheerful, he never rises into the natural outgrowths of those qualities, the extremes of which they are the mean, humor and sublimity, he moves happily along on a high plane with frequent inclinations towards the sublime. He is lacking utterly in humor, as if, living so much with the beautiful, he had no acquaintance with her enemy the

ridiculous. Compare the heavy labored effort to make merry in relating the story of the Fox and the Goat in the Shepherd's Calendar with the light, mirthful, comical "nonne Preestes' Tale". There is not the bright quick, sparkle to his mental caliber which makes a wit. When he strives to vent his displeasure against institutions or persons in satire he fails, his successful missile is scorn. On the other hand, compare the noblest passages of Spenser with such sublime passages of milton as his description of Satan or the angelic warfare, and Spenser's lines will be found to lack that "high seriousness" that characterizes the miltonic passages.

Spenser's frequent compliments to Elizabeth have received more contempt than they deserve. When he eulogized her he was again idealizing his subject, not, as some think, for the purpose of gaining her personal favor, but because he believed one of the chief functions of the poet to be the embellishment and perpetuation of the history of his country. He believed immortality to be the result of the union

of poetry and history and accordingly Elizabeth's

"most humble Servant,
Edmund Spenser,
Did in all humility Dedicate, Present and
Consecrate
These his Labours
To live with the eternity of her fame".

Influences - Received - Given.

Spenser had an almost unlimited admiration for Chaucer. He looked upon him as England's poetical authority.

"Old Dan Geoffry in whose gentle spright
The pure well head of poesie did dwell".

and again:

"Dan Chaucer, well of English undefiled".

He was proud to recognize him as his inspiration and teacher. In reference to Colin Clout he says: "For he of Tityrus (Chaucer) his songs did lere". He did indeed draw largely from Chaucer's "well of English" and as has been already explained, endeavored to employ his diction. Moreover his soul was full of the music of Chaucer's verse; he is consequentially indebted to Chaucer for a large share of the sweetness and music of his verse as well as for the quaint grace imparted by the

archaisms. In Mother Hubbard's Tale and in portions of the Shepherd's Calendar, he followed Chaucer in more than the manner of his song, trying to imitate his general method and treatment of subjects. He also undertook to finish the incomplete story of "Cambuscan bold". But in general he his "songs did lere" more nearly from Tasso's Jerusalem Delivered and Arisso's Orlando. Translations of those stories of Chivalry were very popular in England during Spenser's time, and it was from them that he got his general idea for the Faery Queen. He had besides a wide knowledge of the works of the classic poets, and Italians other than Arisso and Tasso; Dante's influence appears in his religious passages. His idea for Guyon's visit to mammon's delve was evidently drawn from the Divine Comedy. In short while imitating none of his predecessors, he knew them and gained inspiration and strength from them all. — Spenser has ever been the Poet's poet, read and appreciated more by them than by any other class. His writings have had a larger influence upon his successors than is supposed by those who are ignorant of his works. many poets, even Byron, have used the Spenserian stanza. No poet suggests Spenser more frequently than Milton. Scott's attitude towards Spenser is almost comparable to the latter's towards Chaucer.

It takes a poetical nature to enjoy Spenser, but, on the other hand he puts more poetry into the prosaic soul. He who can not read him for delight may do so for profit.

Frances M. Perry - June - 1894.